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Contact: Mark Carr

Tel: 076 515 000

U.S. Africa Command Visits Sierra Leone, Reinforces Partnership

Two senior representatives of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) visited Sierra Leone from October 27-29 to inspect partnership programs and review AFRICOM's successful cooperation with the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). This partnership focuses on improving maritime security and developing RSLAF's Maritime Wing to counter the threat posed by illegal fishing, which costs Africa's fishing industry an estimated one billion U.S. dollars each year.

Ambassador J. Anthony Holmes, Deputy Commander for Civil-Military Activities, and Mr. James Hart, Deputy Director for Programs, met with their RSLAF counterparts, U.S. Embassy officials, and members of the international community. Ambassador Holmes and Mr. Hart also toured the U.S.-supported Transnational Organized Crime Unit (TNCU) and visited the RSLAF Maritime Wing, where they held a press conference. Ambassador Holmes noted that "maritime partnership has been a key and growing initiative" between Sierra Leone and the U.S. He praised the successful participation since 2009 of the Maritime Wing and the Fisheries Ministry in AFRICOM's African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership (AMLEP). To date, this collaborative effort has resulted in several illegal fishing interdictions and significant fines paid to the Government of Sierra Leone.

In addition, AFRICOM has sent several Mobile Education Teams to Sierra Leone to conduct courses in boarding, leadership, resource management, international legal studies, and civil-military relations. Sierra Leonean sailors have also taken part in U.S. Naval Forces Africa Partnership Station, a program designed by the U.S. Navy to enhance regional and maritime safety and security in West and Central Africa.

Ambassador Holmes commended the RSLAF for sending two companies on successive deployments to Darfur to support UNAMID peacekeeping operations, and he noted that a third unit is undergoing training for another potential deployment. He said it was very encouraging to know there is a strong desire for

the RSLAF to participate in peacekeeping operations. Looking to the future, Ambassador Holmes emphasized that the U.S. was committed to being a trusted and reliable partner of Sierra Leone.

AFRICOM is a U.S. military command devoted solely to Africa. It is one of the Defense Department's six regional headquarters. Africa Command is the result of an internal reorganization of the U.S. military command structure, creating one administrative headquarters that is responsible to the Secretary of Defense for U.S. military relations with 53 African countries. Africa Command works with African nations and African organizations to assist them in building regional security and crisis-response capacity in support of U.S. government efforts in Africa. For more information about AFRICOM's maritime security initiatives, please see <http://www.africom.mil/fetchBinary.asp?pdfID=20100503145240>.

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